

The Builder.

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THE treatise on screens and rood-lofts recently published by Mr. Pugin* is directed, apparently, at certain members of his own communion, who object to screens, and the main argument he uses for their introduction requires for acceptance a belief in the doctrine of transubstantiation, which the members of the Reformed Church reject.

"Christians of the present time," says he, "have but little idea of the solemnity of the ancient worship of the Catholic church: ordained ministers were alone permitted to fill the humblest offices about the sanctuary: every object connected with the sacred rites was considered deserving of the most loving care: even in the very early ages, the vessels of the altar were usually of precious metals, and studded with jewels. The books of the holy gospels were written in golden text on purple vellum, bound in plates of silver encasing ivory diptychs, and deposited in portable shrines, like relics. Though all this should fill us with admiration, there is nothing to excite surprise, when we reflect on the very sacred nature of the Christian mysteries—no sign typical and prophetic, as under the Mosaic law, but our blessed Lord truly present and abiding in the temple in the holy sacrament of the altar:—it is by no means wonderful that the Christian worship should assume a form of solemnity formerly unknown, and we are only astounded that with the perpetuation of this doctrine the practice of external solemnity should have so lamentably become decayed in the latter times."

Here, then, in truth, lies the whole question,—a question to be discussed, not by architects, but by theologians,—a question which has been discussed through centuries, and has elain its thousands,—a question on which "Christians are burnt each other, quite persuaded, that all the apostles would have done as they did." We have no intention of discussing it here, or of attempting to interfere with our readers' views in this respect; but it is desirable that every tub should stand on its own bottom, and that those who, like ourselves, profess the reformed religion, appreciate its blessings, and would not willingly see brought back the errors that the reformers cleared away, should be cautioned against receiving doctrines and adopting practices on artistic grounds or antiquarian precedent, calculated, if not intentionally intended, to produce that effect. Mr. Pugin treats the subject as one of great importance:—

"It is not," he writes, "a mere question of architectural detail, respecting a few mullions and a transverse beam, but it involves great principles connected with discipline, and even faith, and it is a question in which all those who either wish for the revival of ancient solemnity and reverence, or even the preserva-

tion of what yet remains, are most deeply interested."

And then, farther on, his earnestness leads him to this coarse assertion:—"If any man says he loves pointed architecture, and hates screens, I do not hesitate to denounce him as a liar, for one is inseparable from the other, and more, inseparable from Catholic arrangement in any style, Byzantine, Norman, Pointed, or debased. We have now to contend for the great principles of Catholic antiquity,—tradition and reverence against modern development and display. It is not a struggle for taste or ornament, but a contention for vital principles. There is a most intimate connection between the externals of religion and the faith itself; and it is scarcely possible to preserve the interior faith in the doctrine of the holy eucharist if all exterior reverence and respect is to be abolished."

The first portion of the quotation is unsound, not to say nonsensical: the second reasserts the point actually at issue, and should serve as a warning to some professing members of the Reformed Church. He repeats, again and again, "that the very *rituals* of (Roman) Catholic architecture are assailed by the opponents of screens." Let the Protestant advocates for their reintroduction on doctrinal grounds, look then to the doctrine which they thereby teach.

Mr. Pugin does not attempt to prove scripturally the necessity for screens. He gives a list of examples and an interesting series of drawings of screens, but these all relate to a time when man's views and devices had been engrafted on religion.

After his stern assertion of the principle involved, the following sounds moderate in tone,—almost, indeed, contradictory:—

"I do not think that the theory, which some writers have advanced, of these close screens being erected to increase the mystery of the celebration, and to procure greater respect for the sacrifice, is tenable: the mass is not more holy in one church or one altar than another, and it is most certain that no parochial churches, built as such, ever had close screens, but always open ones: and, indeed, we very often find altars erected outside these close screens of cathedral and conventual churches, for the benefit of the people, as will be seen by the plates given in this work, which would involve a complete contradiction in principle, supposing the high altar to be hid on symbolical grounds. The close screens belong properly to the choir rather than the altar, as in many Italian churches served by religious, the clergy sat behind the screen, while the altar is partly without, so that the celebration served for both the religious and the people.

At Durham Abbey, the Jesus altar was outside of the great screen; and at St. Alban's Abbey, in the screen which traverses the nave, there are the evident marks of an altar which doubtless served for the parochial mass.

It will be seen from these remarks that close screens, as a principle, are only suitable for churches intended for cathedral chapters or conventual and collegiate bodies; and they are certainly most unsuitable for any churches to be erected in this country under existing circumstances, where the limited extent of means and number of the clergy render it necessary for all services to be available for the faithful in general, and the bishops' churches, like the original basilica, to be in a manner parochial."

There seems no doubt that the introduction of close screens resulted from the use of the long offices, and were "necessary for those who were compelled to remain so many hours in choir, and who would have been unable to

resist the cold if exposed to the free passage of the currents of air which prevail in these large edifices."

Amongst Mr. Pugin's incidental remarks, he gives a slashing to "the huge room called the *Madeleine*," in Paris:—

"Designed by infidels, built by infidels, and suited only for infidel purposes, and then turned over, for want of another use, to become a church! The very decorations are an insult to Christianity: an ambitious conqueror, set up as a deity, occupying the place of our divine Redeemer himself, a mockery and a terrible blasphemy against that God to whose service the place has been unfortunately devoted; moreover, this monument of absurd impiety has been raised at a greater cost than what would have produced one of the fairest churches of mediæval construction, and it is so practically unsuited for even the ordinary requirements of a church, that there are no means for hanging bells, but a vain attempt was made of suspending them in the roof, where they stunned all within the building, and were inaudible to those without, for whose benefit they were intended, and, after a short trial, they were finally removed."

Our author has altered his opinion as to the destruction of sacred edifices consequent on the change of religion in England, and feels compelled to admit that the most fearful acts of destruction and spoliation were committed by men who had not only been "educated in the ancient faith," but who were contented externally to confess its doctrines:—

"Few persons are aware," writes our author, "that the choirs of three of the English cathedrals were completely resailed, and after the old arrangements, by the munificence of churchmen in the seventeenth century: moreover, the completion of some towers and extensive works date from the same period. It is a consoling fact, that the cathedrals of England retain more of their old Catholic arrangements and fittings than most of those on the continent: and as regards the fabric, they have suffered less injury, and have preserved their original character most wonderfully. Architecturally, we must certainly admit that the Anglicans have been good tenants of the old fabrics: we must not test them by the works of preceding centuries, but by the corresponding period; and when we reflect on the debased state of design and art that prevailed, even in those countries which were nominally exclusively Catholic, we may be thankful that our great religious edifices have been so well handed down to our own times, when the recognition of their beauty and grandeur is daily increasing."

The recollection of how differently Mr. Pugin spoke on this subject in a former work, and how greatly his views have changed on other points during his life, should make him more humble and tolerant now. There is little evidence, however, that this is the case: take the following sentence as an evidence to the contrary:—

"It has been most justly said, that there is no legitimate halting-place between [Roman] Catholic doctrine and positive infidelity; and I am quite certain that there is none between a church built on Christian tradition and symbolism and Covent Garden Theatre, with its pit, boxes, and gallery."

And again:—

"It is remarkable what a similarity of feeling against screens is to be found among Puritans and Pagans!"

Mr. Pugin gives four pathetic tales, called "The Calvinist Ambonoclast," "The Pagan Ambonoclast," "The Revolutionary Ambonoclast," and "The Modern Ambonoclast," showing how that an abbe who caused the rood screen in his church to be removed, and

* A Treatise on Chancel Screens and Rood Lofts, their Antiquity, Use, and Symbolic Signification. London: Pugin, 1851.